



[Leon Battista Alberti, 1404 - 1472](#)

## The Point is to Change the World

Any one of the eleven short [Theses on Feuerbach](#) (download linked below) would be adequate on its own as a topic for discussion in a study circle. The most famous of them is the last, and justifiably so:

*“Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”*

This shows Marx in 1845 as being firmly in the camp of those humanists for whom the active, free-willing Subject is the centre and the starting point of all philosophy and all politics.

It puts Marx in the opposite camp from those “materialists” who regard the human as derivative of and secondary to the purely physical. Marx never shifted from this strong and logical position. Marx poses the Subject in a dialectical relation with the Objective universe, but the Subject is the one with the initiative. The Subject makes things happen.

This is different from the idealism that ignores the material world, and it is equally different from the materialism that prioritises the mechanical over the mental.

Ludwig Feuerbach’s intervention into the philosophical debates of the early 1840s, with his book “The Essence of Christianity”, created a sensation in the intellectual crucible that included Marx and Engels as well as the “Young Hegelians” with whom Marx and Engels were falling out at the time.

Reading the eleven “Theses” reveals that Marx immediately recognised Feuerbach as a materialist, but rejected Feuerbach’s brand of anti-religious materialism at once.

Thesis number two says that truth is a practical question. This is something that is repeated later on in the “classics” of Marxism. This, too, reinforces the assertion that the world or universe is a human world or universe. *“It is men who change circumstances”* says Marx in the third Thesis, and *“human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”*

The subsequent Theses develop this understanding through to Thesis 10 which says: *“The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity.”*

This is a good reminder that for Marx in particular, the term “civil society” only means “bourgeois society”, and that therefore for Marxists, “civil society” is something to be overcome and transcended, and not something to be put on a pedestal and worshipped.

The image represents Leon Battista Alberti, the greatest of the renowned rational humanists of the Italian Renaissance. They upheld the idea of the *“uomo universale”* (universal man), and gained the confidence to surpass the achievements of the ancient world after a thousand years of backward feudalism in Western Europe.

The humanists of today are the Marxists.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Theses on Feuerbach, 1845, Marx.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)